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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000761

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H PASS TO CODEL MCCAIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/30/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV IS OVIP

SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY: LIVNI MEETS MCCAIN, DISCUSSES  
GROWING HAMAS SUPPORT, DANGEROUS QUIET IN GAZA

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RICHARD H. JONES FOR REASONS 1.  
4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (U) This cable replaces Tel Aviv 732. Please see  
correction in paragraph 8.

¶2. (C) Summary. On March 19, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met with U.S. Senators John McCain, Joseph Lieberman, and Lindsey Graham. Their discussion centered on the growing public support for Hamas, and the challenges posed by the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, which has continued to quietly fortify its missiles and rockets capabilities. Senator McCain also briefed Livni on Iraq and requested that Israel reopen its embassy in Baghdad before the U.S. presidential elections. End Summary.

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GROWING SUPPORT FOR HAMAS  
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¶3. (C) In a 19 March meeting, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and U.S Senators John McCain, Joseph Lieberman, and Lindsey Graham discussed the growing support for Hamas both in the Gaza Strip and now also in the West Bank. Livni cited statistics published earlier in the week indicating that if elections were held in the West Bank immediately, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh would overturn President Mahmoud Abbas. She noted that this is a new shift in public opinion, which merits some concern. Livni characterized the Fatah/Hamas rivalry as a zero-sum game and lamented that Fatah has not positioned itself to be a real alternative to Hamas. She pointed specifically to conflicts between Salam Fayyad and Fatah over the structure of the government, and the frailty of public opinion to withstand false perceptions of victory generated by Hamas. Livni offered the example of a Hamas "declaration of victory" several days earlier following Israel's withdrawal of tanks upon completing a brief mission in Gaza. She noted that Fayyad is "smart, clean" but that it is very difficult for him to create a better security situation on the ground in the West Bank than exists in Gaza.

¶4. (C) Livni recalled that she had tried to stop Hamas from participating in elections, and that she researched the constitutions and electoral laws of many other countries. She noted that in Europe, a party cannot participate in elections if it supports violence. "Elected parties supporting violence is the threat to pragmatic leadership in the region," Livni argued, noting that this was Europe's lesson learned after World War II. She argued that "democracy has a right to defend itself from those who would threaten it from the inside."

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CHALLENGING QUIET IN GAZA

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15. (C) Addressing the issue of Gaza, Livni suggested that the greatest problem in recent weeks is that on the surface Gaza appears to be calm, while in reality Hamas is quietly continuing to fortify missile and rocket armaments. She lamented that successful efforts to maintain calm and stability in Gaza have only conferred more legitimacy upon Hamas, which has stated that it will never make peace with Israel and is actively building its capabilities in order to raise a greater threat against Israel in the future.

16. (C) Livni asserted that any proposed answer to the situation in Gaza must provide three essential elements: 1) cessation of violence 2) reduction in smuggling, and 3) must not confer further legitimacy upon Hamas. She explained that the possibility of large scale military action in Gaza remains on the table. She added that a military incursion would not be ideal, because it would have the negative effect of generating more support for Hamas, but it would be effective in reducing the capability of Hamas military elements. Livni reflected that sometimes people think that Israeli military action is a cause of extremism, and pointed to the situation in Gaza as an example showing that it is exactly the opposite.

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ANNAPOLIS  
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17. (C) Asked by Lieberman whether the Annapolis process would have a chance of producing any changes, Livni replied that she has invested a great deal of time and energy in the Annapolis process, and so "there is hope." But she immediately noted that Abbas has not made himself available

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to negotiate, pointing out that he "left for Africa two weeks ago and never came back." She added that the Palestinian leader is "too weak," and reminded the senators that when Israel made a small incursion into Gaza, he had immediately called off the negotiations. "I told him" Livni related, "when he does something like this, he makes it impossible for himself to come back to the table."

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IRAQ  
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18. (C) McCain provided Livni a brief account of his visit to Iraq, noting the improving security situation, and stressing that he would like to see moderate Arab countries reopen their embassies in Baghdad and would like Israel deliver the same message to their moderate Arab neighbors. (NOTE: REFTEL reported that McCain requested Israel to reopen its embassy. This is not correct. Israel has never had diplomatic relations with Iraq. END NOTE.) McCain said that with the recent military success in Iraq, it is important to see progress also on the diplomatic side. Senator Graham added that reopening embassies in Iraq before the U.S. elections would help make the point to American voters that Iraq is really turning around. Livni did not offer a reaction to this point. McCain emphasized that the most important thing for Iraqis now is to have the chance to vote in provincial elections. Livni was somewhat skeptical on this point, as well, and replied that Israel and the U.S. cannot afford to have Iraqis misusing elections as in the case of the Palestinian election of Hamas, or the current deadlock in Lebanon.

19. (U) CODEL McCain has not cleared this message.

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